The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

BSL

The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

British Sign Language Plan

2018-2024

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Foreword

It gives me real pleasure as Presiding Officer to provide this brief introduction to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's first British Sign Language (BSL) Plan (2018 to 2024).

I well remember the rapturous reception in the public galleries in September 2015 when the Parliament passed the British Sign Language (Scotland) Bill. It was a great moment in the history of the Parliament. This legislation – unanimously approved – is the first ever BSL legislation in the UK.

It is a commitment by Scotland's lawmakers to promote the place of BSL in everyday life and to underscore its position as a language in its own right.

Through this six-year plan, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body demonstrates its commitment to making the practical improvements in parliamentary services as to how we will support BSL. Through a range of actions, we will seek to integrate BSL into the fabric of the Parliament's work: by involving the BSL community in our planning and interpreting of business, as well as in engagement and outreach events.

Rt Hon Ken Macintosh MSP
Presiding Officer

Introduction

This is the British Sign Language (BSL) plan for the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body (SPCB), produced in compliance with sections 2 and 3 of the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. The plan sets out the actions which the Parliament will take over the period 2018-2024 to improve access to parliamentary information and services to BSL users in the D/deaf and Deafblind communities.

To the extent that the Parliament's functions are exercisable using BSL, our plan follows the BSL National Plan, published on 24 October 2017, which was developed by the Scottish Government through extensive engagement with D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users and those who work with them.

Our BSL Plan is framed around the same long-term goals as the National Plan, where these are relevant to the work of the Scottish Parliament.

Like the BSL National Plan, the SPCB's Plan starts from the principled position that BSL is a language in its own right and that BSL users, like all other citizens of Scotland, have the right to engage with and access information about the Scottish Parliament and its services when they so choose, without unnecessary barriers, including language barriers. It recognises that many D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users neither use nor understand English and that, for some, written or spoken English is not a first or even second language.

The SPCB is committed to protecting and supporting BSL, including in its tactile form.

The SPCB's BSL Plan was developed with input from an internal working group of representatives of all parliamentary offices with responsibility for providing public-facing services. The plan benefitted from the advice of an expert adviser, Professor Graham Turner from the Languages & Intercultural Studies Department at Heriot-Watt University, and from members of an external BSL user reference group. The Project Team also consulted closely with all six parliamentary officeholders to ensure consistency of approach to BSL planning and to facilitate the sharing of resources in the provision of services and materials to the BSL users in the D/deaf and Deafblind communities. In addition, a very successful two-day engagement event was held at the Parliament in May 2018, involving Parliament staff and all officeholders. The event attracted many attendees from across the BSL user communities.

The SPCB is committed to continued engagement around a) implementing actions and b) providing feedback on progress. We see our plan as a 'living document' and, as such, it will be revised and reissued as necessary. We will contribute to the national progress review (interim report) on the BSL National Plan scheduled for 2020. To take account of the outcomes of this review, we have included a review period in 2021 which will also coincide with the end of the Parliament's fifth session.

Lead Officer

Denis Oag, Head of Research and Library, is the lead on this Plan and can be contacted with any questions, ideas or suggestions.

Public Information
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Tel: 0131 348 5000 / 0800 092 7500
Text Relay service: 18001 0131 348 5000

Email**:** denis.oag@parliament.scot
British Sign Language (BSL) users can contact us via contactSCOTLAND-BSL

Versions of this Plan

The BSL and text versions of this Plan are available on our website.

BSL PLAN FOR THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY

Across all our services

We share the long-term goal for all Scottish public services set out in the BSL National Plan, which is:

"Across the Scottish public sector, information and services will be accessible to BSL users."

Actions we will take

By 2024, we will:

1. Analyse existing evidence we have about BSL users in Scotland; identify and fill key information gaps so that we can establish baselines and measure our progress.

2. Develop and adopt best practice guidelines to help improve access to information and services for BSL users. This will include advice on how to involve BSL users in the design and delivery of our services.

3. Improve access to our information and services for BSL users, including making our website more accessible to BSL users.

4. Promote the use of the Scottish Government's nationally funded BSL online interpreting video relay service called 'contactSCOTLAND-BSL', which allows BSL users to contact public and third sector services and for these services to contact them.

Improving accessibility of services and information to BSL users

Across the work of the Scottish Parliament we will build on the accessibility of our particular services and information and, by consulting and developing our contacts with BSL communities, will seek to make further improvements.

Actions we will take

By 2024, we will:

Improve access to parliamentary information/services

5. Issue a regular e-Bulletin in BSL to subscribers and also publish on the Scottish Parliament website and Facebook channel.

6. Ensure that schools and classes using BSL are included in the planning of our in-house and Community Outreach education programmes.

Improve online access

7. Work with BSL users to agree and take forward a programme of work to increase the accessibility of our website and social media channels. (Relates to 4.1.3.)

8. Increase visibility of existing BSL resources available online about the work of the Scottish Parliament using appropriate channels.

9. Ensure that all recordings of BSL-interpreted parliamentary business are freely available on our online channels.

Improve access to parliamentary business

10. Provide and film regular, agreed BSL-interpreted parliamentary business and ensure that access to this is advertised more widely. BSL-interpreted First Minister's Questions (FMQs) will be run first as a pilot for six months.

11. Respond positively to requests from BSL users to arrange interpreting for parliamentary business when required, subject to availability of interpreters and realistic notice timescales.

Promote policies on diversity in the workplace

12. Promote our policies on diversity in the workplace more widely.

13. Ensure wide promotion of our employment opportunities to BSL users in the D/deaf and Deafblind communities.

14. Promote and encourage applications from BSL users in the D/deaf and Deafblind communities for our Academic Engagement programmes.

Improve BSL visitor experience, including access to events

15. Increase access to BSL information for visitors to the Scottish Parliament and ensure that arrangements for BSL interpreting of tours and events are highlighted and made more widely known.

16. Improve signage to BSL standards in the Main Hall and other public areas of the Scottish Parliament building.

17. Promote to BSL users that childcare facilities are available to book in the Scottish Parliament crèche for children under the age of five from Monday to Friday.

18. Always consider the needs and requirements of BSL users in our planning for public engagement meetings and outreach events.

19. Improve the provision of information to BSL users on culture and arts events (for example, Festival of Politics) taking place in the Parliament, including facilitating access to enable BSL users to take part as participants, audience members and professionals.

20. Include BSL users in the selection of BSL-interpreted events in the Festival of Politics and advertise the availability of these more widely.

Build capacity in BSL within the Scottish Parliamentary Service

21. Train our staff to use and promote the use of online interpreting video relay services (which allow BSL users to contact public and third sector services and for these services to contact them), and explore the potential for their greater use. Staff will be encouraged to include video relay details in their email signatures.

22. Offer and encourage participation in BSL awareness training for frontline and engagement staff who work with or who may have contact with BSL users.

23. Offer advanced training in BSL for those members of staff interested in developing their skills, with the aim of increasing the number of parliamentary staff with BSL skills.

24. For appropriate posts, include knowledge of BSL as a key competence when recruiting new staff.

Democracy

We share the long-term goal for democracy set out in the BSL National Plan, which is that:

"BSL users will be fully involved in democratic and public life in Scotland, as active and informed citizens, as voters, as elected politicians and as board members of our public bodies."

Actions we will take

By 2024, we will:

25. Work with the Electoral Commission to ensure improved information about voting for BSL users is made available in time for the next Scottish Parliament elections in 2021 and review whether it has been effective.

26. Improve current material about the Parliament available in BSL, with the aim of enhancing understanding of the role of the Scottish Parliament, its processes and procedures.

27. Promote public appointments as a way of participating in public life by producing information about public appointments in BSL and promoting public appointments specifically to BSL users.

28. Work with other organisations to promote guidance about board appointments to BSL users.

29. Liaise with Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) regarding their access to allowances and to arrange interpreters for constituency work.